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# **It's not just 'us' versus 'them': Moving beyond binary perspectives on intergroup processes**

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### **Abstract**

Most of what we know about the social psychology of intergroup relations has emerged from studies of how one group of people (e.g., whites) think and feel about another (e.g., blacks). By reducing the social world to binary categories, this approach has provided a simple, effective and efficient methodological framework. However, it has also obscured some important features of social relations in historically divided and unequal societies. This paper highlights the importance of investigating intergroup relationships involving more than two groups and of exploring not only their psychological but also their political significance. We argue that this shift in focus may illuminate patterns of domination and subordination, collusion and betrayal, solidarity and resistance that have been generally neglected in our field. Developing this argument, we discuss the conditions under which members of historically disadvantaged groups either dissolve into internecine competition or unite to challenge the status quo, highlighting the role of complex forms of social comparison, social identification, intergroup contact, and third-party support for collective action. To conclude, we suggest that binary conceptualizations of intergroup relations should be treated as the product of specific sets of historical and socio-political practices rather than a natural starting point for psychological research and outline some future directions for research.

Intergroup relations refer to relations between *two or more* groups and their members. Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their group identifications, we have an instance of intergroup behaviour. (Sherif, 1962, p. 12; our emphasis).

In his classic definition of intergroup behaviour, Sherif emphasized the importance of distinguishing between individuals who are interacting on an interpersonal level, as discrete personalities, and individuals who are interacting as group members, in terms of their group identities. In so doing, he laid the foundations for a renaissance of psychological work that was to ‘rediscover’ the social group (Turner et al., 1987), inspiring important new perspectives on processes such as stereotyping, prejudice, attraction, social influence, and leadership (e.g., Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011; Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1993; Turner, 1991). As the phrase italicized in the above quotation indicates, Sherif also recognized that intergroup relations were not necessarily just a matter of ‘us’ versus ‘them’. They could involve more complex patterns of intergroup dynamics and, presumably, more variegated forms of group identification and intergroup behaviour. It is perhaps revealing, however, that in the closing sentence of his classic definition Sherif defaulted to a simpler binary conception. That is, he limited intergroup relations to a question of how individuals belonging to ‘one group’ interact with those belonging to ‘another group’.

In this paper, we argue that this kind of binary conception of intergroup relations has also become the default unit of analysis for social psychology and that, whatever advantages it has conferred, it has also obscured some fundamental features of social relations in historically divided and unequal societies. By way of contrast, we highlight the importance of (re)discovering the *complex relationality* of intergroup processes that involve more than two groups. Failure to do

so, we argue, impoverishes our discipline's capacity to understand the dynamics of conflict, inequality and social change.

In the opening sections of the paper, we discuss the nature, strengths and inherent limitations of a binary perspective on intergroup dynamics. Here we use as an example the legacy of colonial 'divide and rule' structures, which continue to shape intergroup relations in many 'post-colonial' societies. Next, we outline some emerging strands of psychological research that have already begun to transcend such limitations by acknowledging: (1) the multi-group patterning of racial policy attitudes in complexly stratified societies (Dixon, Durrheim & Thomae, 2017a); (2) the significance of 'intermediary' status (Caricati, 2018) groups in promoting or undermining social change; (3) the complex effects of intergroup contact experiences on both vertical and horizontal relations of political solidarity between historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Dixon et al., 2017b); and (4) the role of emergent social identities and third party interventions in shaping collective action (Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2003; Klavina & van Zomeren, 2018; Subašić, Reynolds & Turner, 2008). We focus on the implications of such work for understanding the transformation of power relations and social inequality in historically divided societies. Our paper concludes by arguing that the self-evident nature of intergroup binaries should be treated as a problem to be explained rather than a pre-given starting point for psychological research. This requires us to adopt a dynamic, contextual and historical approach to understanding their emergence and conditions of reproduction. We also outline some integrative themes of our review and make suggestions for future research.

### **The two-group perspective on intergroup relations: Nature, strengths, and limitations**

Our argument is that most psychological research on intergroup relations has framed such relations in binary terms, and this claim needs to be unpacked and substantiated. In the vast majority of studies, we would contend, researchers have focused on pairs of groups whose

relevance to relations in particular contexts have come to appear self-evident or even inevitable: white versus African-Americans (the US), Arabs versus Jews (Israel and Palestine), Catholics versus Protestants (Northern Ireland), and so on. In many other studies, researchers have adopted more generic binary categories, as captured by terminology such as minority-majority, ingroup-outgroup, immigrant-host, and high status-low status groups.

In several respects, the two-group perspective on intergroup relations has served the discipline well. In many historically divided societies, for example, binary oppositions have indeed acquired an overwhelming social, psychological and political salience: one thinks of the profound significance of sectarian identities in Northern Ireland or ethnic identities in the so-called 'Arab-Israeli' conflict. Although we will ultimately argue that this significance is as much problem to be explained as a pre-given starting point for psychological research, it is undeniable that intergroup conflicts often do crystallize around stark 'us' versus 'them' dichotomies.

In addition, the two-group perspective has offered the (considerable) advantage of conceptual and methodological simplicity. It has facilitated the development of theoretical models that are at once parsimonious and of ostensibly general relevance to the explanation of intergroup relations across varying social contexts (e.g., between 'minorities' and 'majorities'). Moreover, by decomposing social relations into their most elementary constituents, such models have also expressed intergroup dynamics in their most accessible, lucid and researchable form. They have thus enabled the development of experimental designs that make economical use of human participants and other resources.

Perhaps for these reasons, the two-group perspective has also underpinned the majority of canonical experiments on intergroup relations in psychology. In their classic 'Summer camp studies', for instance, Sherif and colleagues (1966) conducted arguably the most brilliant and widely cited experiment on groups locked into violent, binary, conflict, laying the foundations for Realistic Conflict Theory. The struggle between the 'Rattlers' and the 'Eagles' has become a

mainstay of our field's textbooks. Similarly, extending Sherif's et al.'s work, Tajfel and colleagues famously showed how dividing participants into arbitrary pairs of categories was sufficient to engender intergroup bias (e.g., Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971). The behaviours of those divided in terms of their supposed preferences for the artists Klee or Kandinsky inspired the development of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which powerfully demonstrated how intergroup discrimination may result from categorization and differentiation processes, generally involving members of dichotomous social categories. More recently, work on implicit prejudices has been built around methodological paradigms that likewise rely on a two-group framework. The Implicit Association Test, which has informed several hundred experiments on the 'hidden biases of good people' (Greenwald & Banaji, 2013), investigates how binary category distinctions such as 'Black' versus 'white' invoke automatic associations with qualities such as 'good' and 'bad'. In sum, in each of these classic methodological paradigms - as in the vast majority of psychological research - an 'us' versus 'them' conception of intergroup processes has become the baseline unit of analysis, often without critical reflection on its potential limitations.

What are those potential limitations? To begin with, the majority of intergroup contexts involve multiple social groups - whether co-present, imagined or implied - implicated in multiple kinds of relationships. As such, the capacity of research that decomposes intergroup relations into dyadic units to explain more complicated webs of collective relations remains unclear. In many areas of research, we simply lack meaningful evidence on this issue; in other areas, the available evidence raises questions.

As an example, consider Harstone and Augoustinos's (1995) variation on the minimal group paradigm. In Experiment 1, which employed a sample of 31 secondary school pupils, they simply replicated Tajfel et al.'s (1971) classic two-group experiment and reported patterns of ingroup bias comparable to previous minimal group experiments. In Experiment 2, which employed a sample of 41 pupils drawn from the same school, they followed a similar methodology, but used three

rather than two groups. They also manipulated power relations between these three groups, with status differences between group members being cued in one three-group condition and not cued another. Their results showed that only the two-group condition elicited significant displays of ingroup bias; in the three-group condition, the majority of participants did not display such bias. Moreover, manipulating the status of the three groups did not appear to moderate this effect. Interpreting their results, Harstone and Augoustinos highlighted, among other factors, the unique cultural significance of dichotomous categorizations, which tend to cue more readily competitive norms and behaviours, thereby fostering 'us' versus 'them' forms of differentiation.

In a comparable program of research, Spielman (2000) employed a minimal group methodology using both two and three-group conditions and working with samples of young kindergarten students ( $n = 113$ ; Study 1) and undergraduate students ( $n = 64$ ; Study 2). In both studies, he also manipulated intergroup competition by providing participants with competitive primes in some experimental conditions and neutral or no primes in others. In a nuanced set of results, Spielman found that the kindergarten children displayed no ingroup bias in *either* two group or three group conditions unless competition was primed. By contrast, undergraduate students generally displayed bias in the two-group condition; however, again, they displayed bias in the three-group condition only when competitive norms were primed. In sum, these findings suggest that the supposedly 'basic' pattern of intergroup bias revealed by minimal group research may be shaped not only by participant age and cultural experience, but also - and more directly relevant to our argument here - by the culturally specific significance of dichotomous forms of categorization.

This kind of complexity was, of course, also anticipated in earlier work. When Deschamps and Doise (1978) made salient two different binaries in the same situation, for example, they observed that intergroup bias was neutralised by the resulting crossed category memberships. Subsequent studies replicated this finding and highlighted that bias created in two-group



situations is often diminished when memberships of comparable social significance are crossed (e.g., Hewstone, Islam & Judd, 1993; Urban & Miller, 1998). Along similar lines, more recent work has shown that 'us' versus 'them' distinctions are often complicated by multiple (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007), complex (Brewer & Pierce, 2005) and superordinate (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) patterns of identification, which in turn shape the nature of intergroup cognitions, emotions and behaviours in ways that may be irreducible to simpler dyadic processes (see also Levy, van Zomeren, Saguy & Halperin, 2017). In sum, experimental scenarios based on binary category distinctions and relationships highlight the effectiveness of binary divisions in fuelling intergroup antagonism, but also show that these results do not necessarily generalise to more complex forms of intergroup relations.

These insights from the experimental laboratory raise two questions of broader relevance: First, how is the cultural significance of binary categories exploited and nurtured in real world conflicts? Second, what are the associated pitfalls of using such binaries as a pre-given conceptual grid to analyse these conflicts? Critical to answering both questions is research on how key conflict agents employ the cultural significance of binaries to mobilise support for their own cause, often by singling out the binaries that make the course of action they are promoting appear legitimate or natural.

To clarify how such 'entrepreneurs of identity' actively invoke categorical oppositions, Elcheroth and Reicher (2014) conducted a systematic analysis of 106 speeches made in the Scottish parliament, shortly before the UK took part in the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and in its immediate aftermath. Their findings showed that while binary oppositions were discernible in all speeches, the conflict was defined in very different terms depending on how it was defined, when, and by whom. On the one hand, supporters of the invasion constructed their argument around an opposition between the world's democrats and (isolated) autocrats, which ultimately evolved into an opposition between the whole (democratic) world and a single tyrannical figure, Saddam

Hussein. On the other hand, opponents to the invasion divided the world into dominant and subordinate groups: “at the start of the debate, English warmongers dragging the Scots into conflict; later, social elites against ordinary people; or, a hegemonic US/British West against Eastern/Arabic peoples” (p.10-11). Interestingly, Elcherot and Reicher (2013) argue, the anti-war camp invested more rhetorical efforts than the pro-war camp in the active construction of intergroup binaries; it also displayed more collective consistency in its categorical constructions and adapted them more flexibly to changing circumstances. In sum, their findings highlighted not only how binary oppositions pervade political discourse about conflict but also, and more important, how any given binary typically forms only one element in a larger system of contested and evolving categorical constructions. It follows that whenever researchers focus attention on a particular two-group dynamic, they are also at risk of perpetuating a particular window on the nature and origins of intergroup conflict.

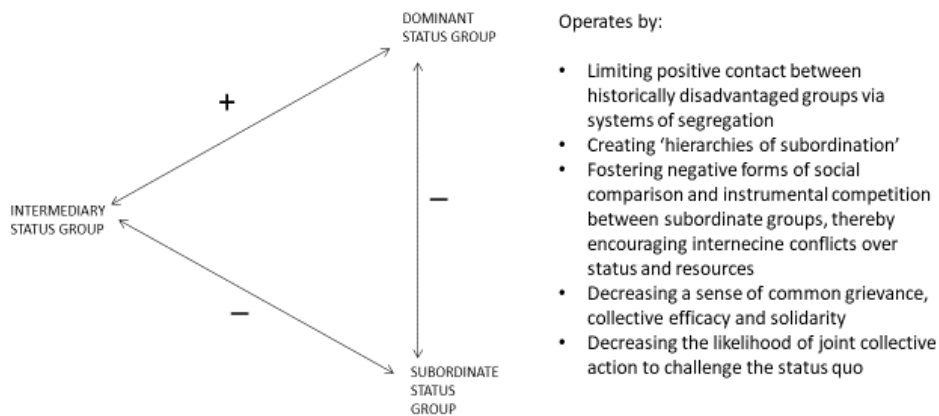
Kerr and colleagues’ (2017) field study of xenophobic violence in a South African farming town avoids this pitfall, demonstrating how intergroup dynamics obfuscated by a binary grid may be revealed when a multi-group perspective is adopted. Their research focused on an event of anti-immigrant violence in which Zimbabwean farm workers were violently evicted from their homes by their black South African neighbours. Their methodology consisted of two rounds of interview-based fieldwork conducted in 2009 and in 2012-2013 respectively. Kerr and four research assistants conducted 65 interviews with various townspeople, including farm workers, farm owners, labour brokers, unemployed people, other workers, and local government officials.

This fieldwork produced some challenging findings. First, whereas many academic accounts of xenophobic violence in South Africa have prioritised the two-way relationship between perpetrators/citizens and victims/immigrants, close analysis of participants’ own accounts of their relationships with other groups in the town revealed a more complex array of relationships were implicated in the Zimbabweans’ eviction: that is, relationships between Zimbabwean workers and

South African workers, Zimbabwean workers and local white farmers, and South African workers and white farmers. For instance, all groups were aware of the 'good' (if highly unequal) relationship between white farmers and Zimbabwean workers, but they judged this 'good' relationship as legitimate or illegitimate according to different criteria. Farmers and Zimbabwean workers argued that the relationship they enjoyed was completely legitimate as Zimbabweans were more reliable, compliant and efficient workers. For many South African farm workers, however, the recent arrival of migrant Zimbabwean workers (in the early 2000s), and farmers' apparent shift of favour to this new group, was seen as an unwanted interference in their own long-standing economic relationship with farmers. Many South African workers constructed *themselves* as the aggrieved party – initially exploited, and now abandoned, by farmers. In the process, Zimbabweans were perceived as the 'favoured' or 'advantaged' group of workers, and this legitimated forcible attempts to make them leave the area. In other words, what seemed initially to be a simple expression of local versus foreign 'xenophobia' ultimately revealed a series of intersecting and nested conflicts, implicating relations of race, class and nationality and revealing complex "...patterns of allegiance, collusion, solidarity, and resistance that seldom feature in social psychological work" (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 15).

The limitations of treating complex forms of intergroup relations as binaries are arguably illustrated even more starkly within societies where policies of 'divide and rule' (cf. Christopher, 1988) have been systematically implemented during their colonial past. The underlying logic of such policies, in effect, displays an intuitive grasp of intergroup processes that social psychologists have often underplayed. This logic is captured in Figure 1 panel (a), while panel (b) captures some countervailing processes through which members of different historically disadvantaged communities may build political solidarity.

## (a) Divide and rule



## (a) Unite and resist

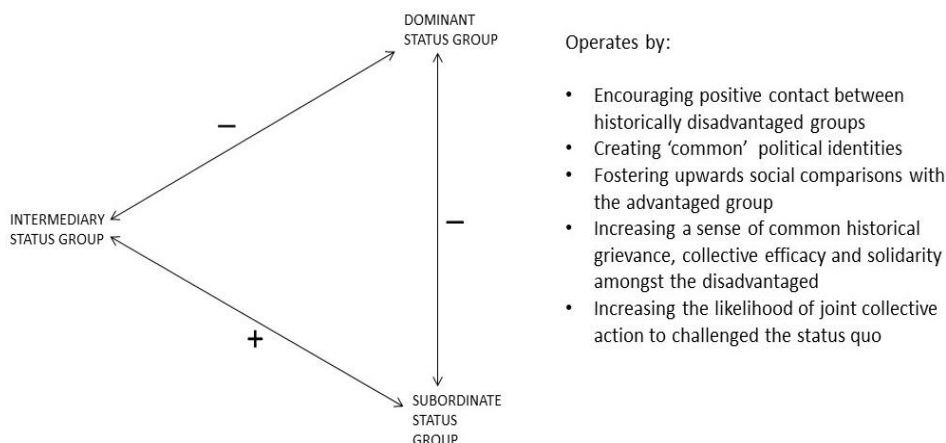


Figure 1. Intergroup attitudes and political solidarity between historically divided communities

Note: In panel (a) in this figure the signs – and + indicate the broad pattern of intergroup attitude valences that 'divide and rule' systems are generally designed to encourage. In panel (b), the signs – and + indicate the broad pattern of intergroup attitude valences under which subordinate groups are generally predisposed to act together to challenge the status quo

To use an iconic example: the apartheid system in South Africa installed material and status divisions not only between ‘whites’ and ‘non-whites’, but also between all four of the officially classified population groups – ‘whites’, ‘blacks’, ‘coloureds’ and ‘Indians’. From the outset, the legal segregation of residential, educational, social and occupational spaces was designed to prevent contact between these varying racial groups. Legislation such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 was in effect designed to dismantle *multiracial* neighbourhoods in cities such as Cape Town and Durban (e.g., see Kuper, Watts & Davies, 1958; Western, 1981; see Figure 2 below). Practices of segregation were also harnessed as a tool to widen cultural and linguistic divisions between sub-groups of black Africans in the workplace, pre-empting processes of unionisation in industries such as mining (e.g., see Crush, 1992). At the same time, policies granting concessionary privileges to some disadvantaged groups but not others - such as the so-called ‘Coloured Labour Preference Policy’<sup>1</sup> – again widened the gap between communities who were common victims of Apartheid. They effectively created *hierarchies of subordination* in which groups became embedded in a positional matrix of power relations that was irreducible to the dynamics of white versus black segregation and that arguably continues to find expression in local ‘race relations’ (Adhikari, 2006). In sum, as Dixon et al. (2015, p.578) observe,

“... apartheid was based on a ‘divide and rule’ strategy that sought to pre-empt the formation of seditious allegiances. This strategy was accomplished through numerous tactics: from the selective conferral of economic privileges to the ‘preservation’ of cultural differences to sponsorship of internecine violence. However, the segregation of different factions of the disadvantaged was fundamental. The apartheid authorities felt that too much contact between historically disadvantaged communities posed a risk to the system. They worried that it might enable the development of political solidarity between them.”

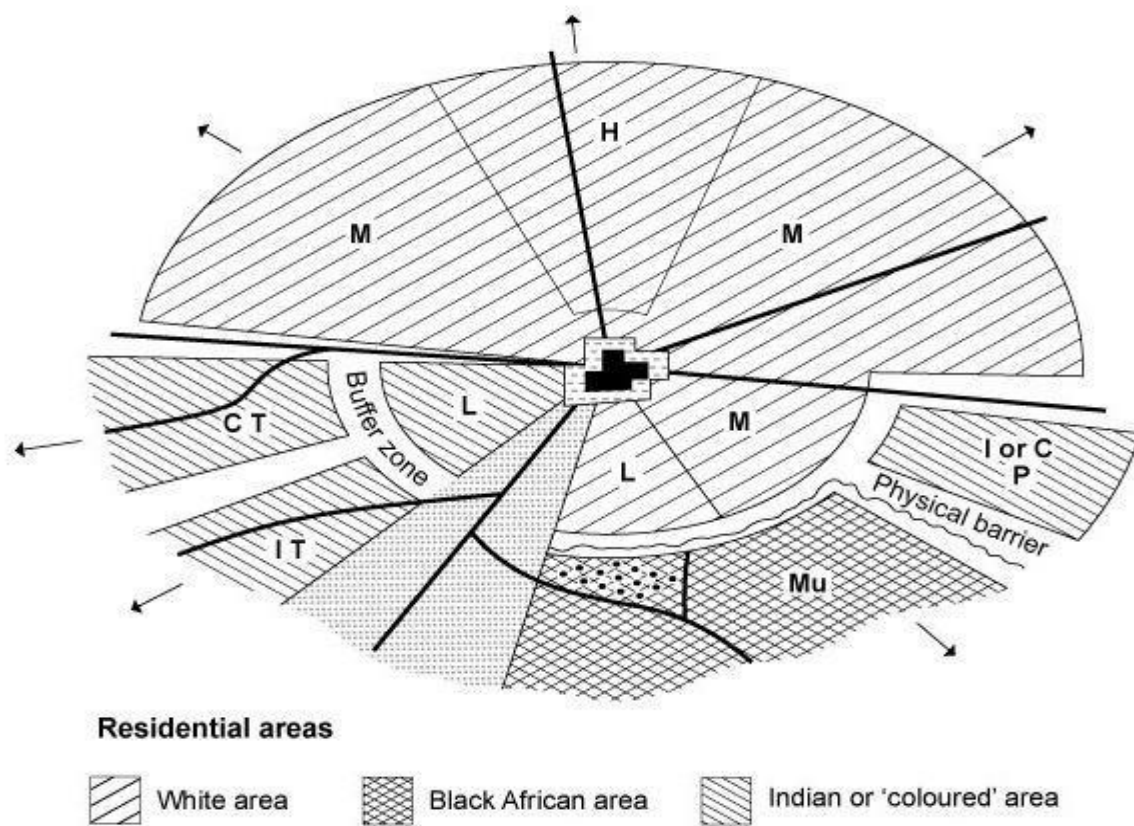


Figure 2. The Apartheid city

Note: Economic status: H: High; M: Middle; L: Low; Mu: Municipal townships; T: Township; P: Privately developed; C: Coloured; I: Indian (taken from Davies, 1981).

What is true of the South African context, we would argue, is also true of many other 'post-colonial' contexts. After all, colonialism is not so much a singular event as an evolving structure designed to shape a society's political future, and in many societies that structure has evolved around the problem of governing colonial subjects embedded within complex webs of intragroup and intergroup relations. As such, in 'post-colonial' contexts such as Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Palestine, amongst others, a binary frame of reference provides a limited starting point for understanding either past, present or future relations between groups. In Rwanda, for example, it

risks effacing the role of Belgian colonists in systematically accentuating category and status divisions between Tutsis and Hutus (e.g., via the establishment of ethnic identity documents), leaving a legacy that is now a focus of interventions to transform the society in the wake of its genocide (Moss, 2014; Moss & Volhardt, 2016). In Sri Lanka, it risks reducing the civil war that has ravaged the island over decades to an ethnic strife between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. As well as grossly simplifying the range of domestic actors and groups involved (e.g. Tamil-speaking Muslims, Indian Tamils, Christian minorities on both sides, cross-ethnic political parties and social movements), this overlooks how, historically, the conflict originated in British colonial policies of divide-and-rule, which marginalised the Sinhalese and created a sense of collective grievances among the majority (De Votta, 2004). In Palestine, it risks neglecting how colonial rule effectively created and reproduced sectarian identities and citizenship criteria (Banko, 2016; Haiduc-Dale, 2013), whilst also ignoring the current third-party role of the Palestinian authority as an institutional mediator between Palestinian people and Israeli government (Albzour, Penic, Nasser & Green, in press).

On a broader level, as we have barely begun to demonstrate, a binary perspective may provide a limited starting point for understanding the social psychology of intergroup relations in *any* complexly stratified society and not just in post-colonial contexts. In the next section, we discuss some areas of psychological and sociological research that have recently started to move beyond such a perspective. The aim here is to review several emerging strands of work, laying some foundations for future research on the complex relationality of intergroup dynamics in historically unequal societies.

## **Moving beyond a binary perspective on intergroup processes**

### **Understanding policy attitudes in complexly stratified societies**

Research on attitudes towards policies designed to tackle ethnic and racial inequality has been structured around a paradox: support for the ideal of equality has steadily grown over the past 60 years, but resistance to its concrete implementation has endured (e.g., see Dixon, Durrheim & Thomae, 2017a for a review). Work on this 'Principle-Implementation' gap (cf. Prothro & Grigg, 1960) has largely focused on how, when and why members of historically advantaged groups resist interventions such as affirmative action, welfare subsidies and school desegregation, seeking to explain, for example, the stark disjunction between white Americans' "... gradual elevation to lofty racial policy principles and their meagre support for policies designed to implement those principles (Jackman, 1996, p. 760)." Among other factors, such work has highlighted the role played by intergroup competition, symbolic and old-fashioned prejudice, and attributions about the nature of inequality in explaining why historically advantaged group members resist race-targeted policies (see Dixon et al., 2017a).

The factors shaping the policy attitudes of historically disadvantaged communities have received considerably less attention; nevertheless, available evidence has identified some important trends. Perhaps unsurprising, black Americans show significantly higher levels of support for race-targeted policies than white Americans, a finding that may reflect the role of group interests as well as intergroup differences in beliefs about the nature, extent and causes of racial inequality (e.g., see Bobo, 2011). At the same time, the policy attitudes of black Americans display a principle-implementation gap similar to, though generally less extreme, than that of white Americans. For example, black Americans' support for the ideal of desegregated education is virtually 100%; however, their support for policies designed to accomplish that ideal has been significantly lower (e.g. see Krysan & Moberg, 2016). Historically, for instance, research on black



attitudes towards school busing programmes indicates that support has hovered between 50 and 60% (Sigelman & Welch, 1991), suggesting that a substantive minority rejected this means of achieving school desegregation. Moreover, *race preferential* policies (e.g., affirmative action), which directly confront whites' socioeconomic advantages, produce more opposition amongst black Americans than *race compensatory* policies (e.g. job training programmes), which focus on improving future opportunities (Tuch & Hughes, 1996).

According to Jackman (1994), the latter pattern reflects the inherently relational nature of policy attitudes, as expressed via subordinate group members' vigilance about how dominant group members think, feel and respond in hierarchical social systems. Supporting policies that directly challenge the status quo carries, among other risks, the threat of reprisal and potential erosion of current and future benefits. Arguably for this reason, such policies are evaluated cautiously by groups such as black Americans, who "...learn to throw more energy into issues that keep a safer distance from core redistributive concerns." (Jackman, 1994, p. 259).

Whereas most research relevant to this theme has focused on binary relations (e.g. between whites and blacks), some emerging work has treated it as a more complex, multigroup problem. In this respect, research on the policy attitudes of intermediary status groups, such as Asian and Latino Americans in the US, is particularly revealing. Lopez and Pantoja (2004) reported that racial attitudes towards affirmative action policies in the US display a clear rank ordering: black Americans display most support, whites least, and Latinos and Asians are positioned between these two extremes. Drawing on data collected as part of the Los Angeles County Social Survey, Bobo (2000) similarly reported that racial minorities in the US, including Asians and Latinos, displayed less negative attitudes towards affirmative action than whites, particularly when interventions were perceived as benefitting their own group. However, he reported that black Americans again generally displayed least opposition to such policies. Although such effects are moderate in size, Bobo argued that they nevertheless represent an 'American racial hierarchy' in

terms of opposition to affirmative action policies, with group differences remaining statistically significant even when potentially associated variables such as conservatism, socioeconomic status, and individualism are controlled.

The 'in betweenness' of Asian and Latino Americans' policy attitudes is at once intuitively obvious and potentially vital for understanding the dynamics of social change in complexly stratified societies. On the one hand, given the intergroup distribution of power, opportunity and resources in societies such as the US, is it surprising that intermediary status groups' attitudes towards race-targeted policies fall between the poles anchored by whites (least supportive) and blacks (most supportive)? Arguably, such attitudes reflect the underlying dynamics of intergroup competition in which intermediary groups have as much to lose as they have to gain by challenging the racial hierarchy. To maintain material privileges and avoid downwards assimilation, members of such groups may both distance themselves from those positioned 'beneath' them in the racial hierarchy and treat race-targeted policies that threaten to disrupt the status quo with due caution (though see Wodke, 2012, for a useful summary and critique of this perspective).

On the other hand, the 'in betweenness' of the policy attitudes of intermediary status group members may reflect social, psychological and political dynamics that are ultimately irreducible to a simple intergroup competition model, opening up opportunities for promoting political solidarity and coalition-building. In their research on the voting patterns of Asian Americans, for instance, Kuo, Malhotra and Mo (2014) have highlighted when and why such groups tend to favour Democrat political candidates and associated policies. To summarize a richer pattern of results, their attitude survey and experimental studies identified number of key trends. First, Asian Americans (over 70%) by and large identify as Democrats, and this trend has steadily grown over the past decade. This is perhaps surprising given their relatively strong economic status in the US,

a factor that tends to correlate with support for Republicanism and related conservative social policies. Second, Asian Americans' identification as Democrats is partly explained by their experiences of racial victimization, bearing in mind that the Democratic party has historically been associated with more tolerant and inclusive attitudes towards ethnic and racial minorities in the US. Third, this identification is also partly explained by perceptions of political solidarity with other ethnic minority groups vis à vis the white majority. That is, Asian Americans who perceive commonality with other ethnic minority groups tend to align themselves with these groups rather than with whites; as such, they tend to endorse Democrat political candidates and associated policy programmes.

In sum, work on the principle-implementation gap in public support for policies for redressing racial inequality in the US has historically focused on the attitudes of the historically advantaged community, namely white Americans. However, researchers have recently acknowledged the relational nature of such attitudes, investigating not only how binary relations (e.g. between white and black Americans) may affect policy attitudes, but also how such attitudes express more complex ethnic and racial dynamics. This shift is important not least because the establishment of political coalitions between disadvantaged communities may affect whether or not race-targeted policies such as affirmative action are implemented successfully, if at all (see also Lopez & Pantoja, 2004).

### **Complex social comparisons: The role of intermediary status groups in (resisting) social change**

Caricati and colleagues have also sought to elucidate the intergroup attitudes and behaviours of group members who occupy an intermediary position within social hierarchies, proposing a Triadic Model of Social Stratification (see Caricati, 2018, for an overview). Drawing broadly on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this model emphasizes the importance of ingroup identification (our sense of who *we* are), positive distinctiveness (our desire to maintain a positive

collective self-image) and perceived system stability (our sense of the degree to which the current status hierarchy is secure) in determining when and why such members act in ways that shore up the social order. In so doing, it also clarifies some of the conditions under which intermediate status groups might seek to challenge the status quo.

Intermediary status groups, Caricati (2018) argues, occupy a unique position with the social hierarchy in terms of maintaining a positive social identity. On the one hand, 'upwards' social comparisons with higher status groups may provoke identity threat and an associated loss of positive distinctiveness, social status and self-esteem. On the other hand, 'downwards' social comparisons with lower status groups may bolster ingroup identity and distinctiveness. Given that group members are generally motivated to maintain rather than lose social status, Caricati (2018) proposes, they will generally favour downwards over upwards social comparison and this may, in turn, foster reactionary attitudes towards social change. This outcome is particularly likely when such group members perceive extant status relations to be unstable, with the resulting potential for erosion of their group's social standing. Under such conditions, the 'in betweenness' of middle status group members in the social hierarchy creates 'a fear of falling' (cf. Ehrenreich, 1989) and, more acutely, a 'last place aversion effect' (Caricati, 2018). This may lead them to resist even forms of social change that are materially beneficial to their own group, yet also threaten to alter the intergroup status hierarchy.

In a series of experimental studies, Caricati and colleagues have sought to test empirically varying elements of their Triadic Model of Social Stratification. Examining the responses of nurses in a health care context, for example, Solami and Caricati (2015) manipulated status relations between physicians (higher status group), nurses (intermediary status group) and health care operators (lower status group). To do so, they fostered perceptions that such relations were either stable (unlikely to change), unstable-ameliorative (likely to change in a way that improved nurses' standing) or unstable-detrimental (likely to change in a way that reduced nurses'

standing). They found that nurses associated the unstable status-detrimental condition with identity threat, but that *neither* the stable nor unstable-ameliorative conditions invoked such threat. In a follow up study that used a similar design, Caricati and Solami (2017) investigated nurses' perceptions of the legitimacy of the professional status hierarchy, a variable that has been consistently associated with systems justification. In this case, unsurprisingly, the unstable-detrimental condition produced highest levels of perceived illegitimacy and the unstable-ameliorative lowest levels. However, perhaps more interesting, in the stable status condition system legitimacy ratings were also comparatively high, arguably sustaining nurses' acceptance of the existing professional hierarchy and reducing the likelihood they develop political solidarity with other low status health care workers.

The potential effects of status stability on patterns of relations between groups embedded in triadic hierarchies have been clarified by Caricati and Moncelli (2012). Specifically, they found that when intermediate status group members believed their social status would improve in an unstable hierarchy, they espoused more negative attitudes towards high status group members. Conversely, when they believed their status would deteriorate in an unstable hierarchy, they espoused more negative attitudes towards lower status group members. In so far as such intergroup attitudes help to shape members' willingness to recognise and challenge social inequality, they again carry potential implications for achieving social change in historically unequal societies.

In sum, Caricati and colleagues' work has brought to centre stage questions that have been neglected by social psychologists. Notably, when and why do intermediary status group members either acquiesce to an established intergroup hierarchy or strive to improve their own and others' position within this hierarchy? In so doing, they have highlighted the central role of complex forms of (upwards and downwards) social comparison and identification as well as ideological beliefs about the stability of the status quo. Building on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner,

1979), they have also complicated the common sense, but potentially limiting, supposition that group interests in complexly stratified societies are purely instrumental, being designed to maximize material gain. The dynamics of social identification associated forms of social competition may play an equally important role.

Caricati and colleagues' work, however, also carries some potentially pessimistic implications for transforming social inequality. If political solidarity between intermediary and lower status groups is only likely to emerge when the former are reassured that their social status will not deteriorate during episodes of social change, which may entail unpredictable conditions of mass mobilization, institutional reform and sometimes violent struggle, then how likely is such solidarity to emerge in practice? What social and psychological processes might encourage members of groups located at various positions in a political hegemony to abandon the presumption that they are locked in a zero-sum, struggle for status and resources? How might 'us' versus 'them' categorizations give way to 'we' categorizations? In the next section, addressing such questions, we explore the potential role of intergroup contact in (re)configuring complex relations of political solidarity.

### **Intergroup contact and relations of political solidarity**

The 'contact hypothesis' (Allport, 1954) is often portrayed as one of social psychology's most significant contributions to improving intergroup attitudes and reducing discrimination. The empirical literature on this hypothesis now runs to several hundred studies (e.g. see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011; Vezzali & Stathi, 2017). Many of them elaborate a deceptively simple idea: when members of conflicting groups are afforded the opportunity to experience positive interactions with one another, their prejudices decline and, by implication, wider forms of social change are promoted. We now know that under the 'right' conditions (e.g. equality of status) contact is likely to improve negative attitudes and stereotypes and that this effect holds across a range of social

contexts and types of intergroup relations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). We know, too, that intergroup contact works primarily via its effects on positive emotions such as empathy and forgiveness and negative emotions such as threat and anxiety (e.g. Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011).

Like other areas of prejudice research, research on intergroup contact has focused mainly on transforming the attitudes and stereotypes held by historically advantaged groups. Research on the effects of contact for historically disadvantaged groups remains comparatively limited and suggests the effects of contact tend to be weaker than for advantaged groups (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Research on forms of contact involving more than two groups is more limited still. That being said, work on the so-called ‘secondary transfer’ effects of contact (Pettigrew, 2009) offers a promising line of inquiry that has begun to move the field beyond a binary conception of intergroup relations.

The concept of ‘secondary transfer’ highlights how the social psychological impact of contact may generalise to groups not directly involved in such contact. Thus, for example, positive contact with ‘illegal’ immigrants might improve local residents’ attitudes towards other social groups, such as legal immigrants, political refugees and homeless people (see Harwood et al., 2011). Similarly, positive contact with black or Latino Americans might improve white Americans’ attitudes toward other ethnic minorities (e.g. see Shook, Hopkins & Koech, 2016; Van Laar, Levin, Sinclair, & Sidanius, 2005). Evidence suggests that such effects are not confined to reductions in prejudice (e.g. as measured using scales such as the ‘feeling thermometer’), but also may impact on wider political beliefs and policy attitudes. Flores (2015), for instance, reported that experiences of interacting with members of the gay or lesbian community shaped participants’ acceptance of Trans-persons’ rights in the United States, including policies to protect against discrimination in the workplace. Tee and Hegarty (2015) likewise reported that support for Trans-persons civil rights in the United Kingdom (e.g. the right to have medical treatment appropriate to a ‘new’ gender) was positively associated with experiences of contact with the gay and lesbian community.

Secondary transfer effects, in other words, may facilitate activism that extends beyond the social category memberships directly involved in social contact, creating wider patterns of political solidarity.

This optimistic picture is qualified, however, by some additional considerations. First, the degree to which secondary transfer effects generalise is strongly shaped by the perceived similarity of the target group 'in contact' relative to potential secondary groups (Tausch et al., 2010). Indeed, there seems to be a *generalization gradient* (Harwood et al., 2011) in that "...secondary transfer effects do not increase tolerance across the board: they are stronger for more similar groups and weaker for less similar groups" (p.186).

Second, and perhaps more important, the secondary transfer effects of *vertical contact* between historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups on political attitudes and behaviours may, paradoxically, have both positive and negative implications for social change, particularly if we conceive contact in terms of its complex relationality. Positively, as evidenced above, such contact may promote generalized activism amongst the historically advantaged in support of a range of lower status groups (and not just those directly involved in contact). In addition, it may not only encourage members of disadvantaged groups to like the advantaged more but also, in some circumstances, also to like fellow subordinate group members more (e.g. Brylka, Jasinskaja-Lahtia & Mähönen, 2016). Negatively, however, the secondary transfer effects of positive vertical contact may carry some surprising and perhaps even ironic consequences for social change (cf. Dixon et al., 2012), which have been neglected by all but a handful of psychological studies.

In an experimental study, Glasford and Calcagno (2011) investigated political solidarity amongst members of two historically disadvantaged groups, namely African American and Latino communities in the US. They anticipated that experimentally priming a sense of common identity amongst a sample of Latinos (n=41) would increase their readiness to collaborate with African Americans to improve their joint socio-political situation in the US. Their results suggested that



this was indeed the case. Latino participants in a condition that primed common identification reported greater ( $p < .05$ ) political solidarity ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ) than participants in either a control condition ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) or in a condition that flagged Latino-African American group differences ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ). However, the effect of this common identity prime was also moderated by (triadic) contact with members of the historically advantaged white community. That is, the more intergroup contact Latinos had previously experienced with white Americans, the less effective this experimental prime was in fostering their political solidarity with African Americans. In other words, positive contact with an historically advantaged group effectively 'sedated' (cf. Cakal et al., 2011) the impact of an intervention designed to foster solidarity between two historically disadvantaged communities.

Dixon et al. (2017b) reported a related set of findings, based on a cross-sectional survey conducted in India that focused on relations between Hindus, Muslims, and other lower status groups.<sup>2</sup> They found that contact between Muslims and other disadvantaged groups was associated with Muslims' motivation to engage in common collective action, an effect partially explained by a heightened recognition of shared grievances. However, they also found this tendency was itself moderated by Muslims' past experiences of positive contact with the Hindu majority. Once again, the more positive contact Indian Muslims experienced with an historically advantaged group, the less willing they were to engage in collective action to benefit the disadvantaged of India more broadly defined.

In sum, in so far as forming political coalitions of the disadvantaged who engage in unified action to transform society is often fundamental to social change, then ironically the secondary transfer effects of contact may both facilitate and inhibit the transformation of intergroup power relations (see also Dixon, Levine, Reicher & Durrheim, 2012; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Their positive ramifications in terms of *diffusing* prejudice reduction through a wider network of intergroup relations is now well-established, particularly when augmented by perceived

intergroup similarity. At the same time, such benefits may be offset by their negative ramifications in terms of *defusing* collective activism and bonds of political solidarity amongst varying disadvantaged communities.

We will revisit some of these tensions further in our closing section on 'future directions'. However, the next section will focus on the role of third parties in collective action to achieve social change.

### **Common identification, third parties and collective action**

Relational models of collective protest are increasingly *de rigueur* in social psychology. Whereas once collective action, particularly mass collective action, was treated mainly as an irrational by-product of group psychology - an endemic feature of intragroup processes such as 'deindividuation', loss of identity and contagion (see Reicher, 1984) - our discipline has gradually evolved a less reactionary perspective. Growing recognition of the relational nature of mass collective action has revealed how its origins typically reflect intergroup as well as intragroup dynamics, heightened group identification rather than 'loss' of identity, and behaviours that are contextually constrained rather than unbridled expressions of irrational impulses (Postmes & Spears, 1998). As a result, the field has evolved a richer perspective on collective action than hitherto existed<sup>3</sup>.

The majority of relational work on collective action, however, remains limited by the two-group focus that we have discussed in the present paper; that is, it typically continues to pit a single outgroup against a single ingroup. Again, this work carries the decided advantage of furnishing clear predictions and powerful demonstrations of the intergroup nature of collective action. However, as Drury, Stott and colleagues (e.g. Stott & Drury, 2000), Subašić, Reynolds and Turner (2008), and Klavina and van Zomeren (2018) have argued, it also disregards the relational

complexity of collective action and, more specifically, the crucial role that third parties may play in shaping how such action unfolds.

Work on crowd behaviour provides a particularly rich source of new understandings of the nature of collective action in general and of the dynamics of relations between more than two groups in particular. An example is Stott and Drury's (2000) ethnographic study of the 1990 anti-poll tax demonstration in the UK. Field notes, video data and police and media reports were used to construct a narrative of events, and interviews with police and with 35 protest participants were used to examine experiences and perceptions. The analysis found that, at the same time that people were united by the anti-poll tax cause, the protest crowd was characterised by a number of divisions (including different regional groups, political groups, and other identities – 'nuns against the poll tax', 'bikers against the poll tax' etc.). A more fundamental division was between the small minority who sought conflict with the police, and the rest, though the majority largely ignored this minority and regarded them as largely irrelevant.

Yet there was an *asymmetry of categorical representations* in that the police's perception of the crowd differed from the crowd's own view of itself in crucial ways. First, the police saw the 'troublesome minority' as representative, rather than unrepresentative, of the crowd as a whole. Second, police saw this small group as especially powerful and able to influence the gullible 'mass' (Stott & Reicher, 1998). Third, police saw actions that the crowd regarded as traditional and legitimate – such as a sit-down protest – as threatening incipient disorder. Importantly, the police had the capacity to act upon these perceptions and impose themselves on the crowd – by riding police horses into the crowd and moving against the crowd with officers in 'riot gear'.

This intervention inadvertently began a dynamic that transformed relations in the event as a whole. Not only was the police incursion seen as illegitimate (since crowd members felt they were doing nothing wrong), but critically it was also experienced as indiscriminate: everybody in the crowd as a whole was at risk from the police action. The sense of common fate engendered was the basis of a new and inclusive self-categorization. The 'us' that now faced the hostile police 'outgroup' comprised all the previous subgroups, including the 'violent minority'. Indeed, since the

overall relationship was now one of conflict, the actions of those seeking violence were now seen as more prototypical of the ingroup. Thus, collective action had changed in form (who was included) and in content (what was normative).

The same kinds of complex relational dynamics have been observed in social movement phenomena, including anti-roads protests where new alliances between activists and locals developed as a result of unexpected police interventions against a crowd (Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2003; Drury & Reicher, 2000). More recently, research has shown some parallel processes operating in the 2011 English riots. Similar to the earlier studies, Stott et al. (2018) used data triangulation of multiple sources (including police crime figures, 60 online videos, news articles, Tweets, and official reports) and thematic analysis of 41 interviews with rioters carried out as part of the *Guardian/LSE Reading the Riots* project (Lewis et al., 2011). This combined analysis allowed Stott et al. to examine both the contours of collective action and the experiences of rioters in Tottenham, North London. Here, the initial fear among rioters was not the police but other marginalized groups. Their lives were normally governed by long-standing 'postcode rivalries', whereby young people are constrained by territorial codes preventing them from moving freely across different London districts. Within the riots, however, shared antagonism toward the police allowed a sense of collective identity to be recognised that superseded these prior hostilities. This common identity was characterized not merely as a reaction to police action in the immediate context of the riot, but also as a consequence of their shared historical day-to-day experiences of illegitimate policing, including regular harassment. This emergent, shared, anti-police identity enabled collective action against the police as well as other targets:

Q. Did you see people that you knew there?

A. Yeah. Some people that I didn't really speak to – 'cause we're on opposite postcodes. But it didn't really matter.

Q. Why did it not matter?

A. Coz it's the lesser of two evils.

Q. What do you mean?

A. The police are the biggest crime ever. It doesn't matter where you're from anymore. So, who's the greater evil? Your enemy's enemy?

(cited in Stott et al., 2018, p. 843)

In related work, Subašić and colleagues (2008) have highlighted the inherent limitations of a model of social change focused exclusively either on top down processes of prejudice reduction, emphasizing attitude change amongst members of historically advantaged groups, or bottom up processes of collective resistance, emphasizing the mass mobilization of members of historically disadvantaged groups. By contrast, their Tripolar Model of Political Solidarity explores when and why historically advantaged and disadvantaged communities form alliances, acting together to challenge the hegemony of political elites. A key assumption here is that collective action is often most effective when it establishes political solidarity between members of both dominant and subordinate groups (see also Mallet, Huntsinger, Sinclair & Swim, 2008) - as evidenced to some extent, for example, during the collapse of slavery in the US and the fall of the apartheid system in South Africa.

According to Subašić et al. (2008), this kind of solidarity tends to follow underlying shifts in the perceived nature of social identity and associated forms of intergroup behaviour. Specifically, when the collective values, norms and everyday practices of political elites become discrepant from how historically advantaged communities themselves conceive their identities, then alternative (e.g., pro-social change) sources of influence start to gain traction and the development of new forms of identification with the disadvantaged becomes possible. That is, a new common sense of 'we' emerges defined by the desire to challenge collectively the status relations and forms of discrimination enforced by political authorities (see also Ferguson, Branscombe & Reynolds, 2018, whose 'Emergent Ingroup Identity' model offers a related theoretical perspective).

To examine these processes, Subašić, Schmitt and Reynolds (2011) experimentally manipulated whether or not participants thought of themselves in terms of an inclusive

superordinate identity (Canadian), which was explicitly defined by egalitarian norms and values, or a subgroup identity devoid of such values (consumer). They showed that under conditions in which the inclusive superordinate identity was salient, participants (i.e., the majority in the context of the study) were more likely to engage in collective action in solidarity with sweatshop workers (Canadian Identity Salient:  $M=5.69$ ,  $SD=1.63$ ; Consumer Identity Salient:  $M=4.72$ ,  $SD=1.94$ ). In line with findings from crowd action research, this experimental work shows that when power is used in a way that violates self-defining norms and values, political solidarity with groups disadvantaged by such mistreatment is more likely (Subašić, Schmitt & Reynolds, 2011).

Further, Subašić and colleagues (2018) investigated how both men and women may be mobilised to act in solidarity for gender equality. Traditionally, psychological research primarily examines why gender inequality persists, positioning men as perpetrators and women as victims of various forms of prejudice and bias. In contrast, Subašić and colleagues (2018) examined how men and women can be mobilised for gender equality as agents of social change who are willing to challenge the status quo. The struggle for gender equality does not simply involve men and women (a bipolar context), but is (at least) tripolar once we consider people's orientation towards the status quo and political authorities. As such, a key question in explaining action for gender equality may instead concern whether one is willing to defend the status quo, actively challenge it, or yet to be engaged with the issue. Paradoxically, when it comes to gender equality it is necessary to look beyond gender to explain when people (and men in particular) may be willing to actively support this issue. Given that those willing to defend the status quo are typically (a) men and (b) in position of leadership and authority, men's mobilisation may rest on the availability of male exemplars prepared to challenge inequality and lead for change in solidarity with women.

To test these ideas, across three experiments gender equality was described either as a 'women's issue' or a 'common cause' concerning both men and women. When gender equality was framed as an issue that concerns us all (not just women), gender differences in support for

collective action disappeared, so that men became just as likely as women to support change (Subašić et al, 2018). However, this effect was qualified by whether the solidarity message was attributed to a male or female leader (Experiment 3; see Figure 3). That is, men were more likely to act in solidarity with women when the common cause message was espoused by a male rather than a female leader. Male leaders' willingness to challenge the status quo signals a viable pathway towards change but also that those who support the status quo may be out of step with who 'we' are. As such, to explain how people are mobilised for social change (including mobilisation across intergroup divides), it seems necessary to consider the nexus of social identity and social influence (see also Reicher, Haslam & Hopkins, 2005; Subašić et al, 2012).

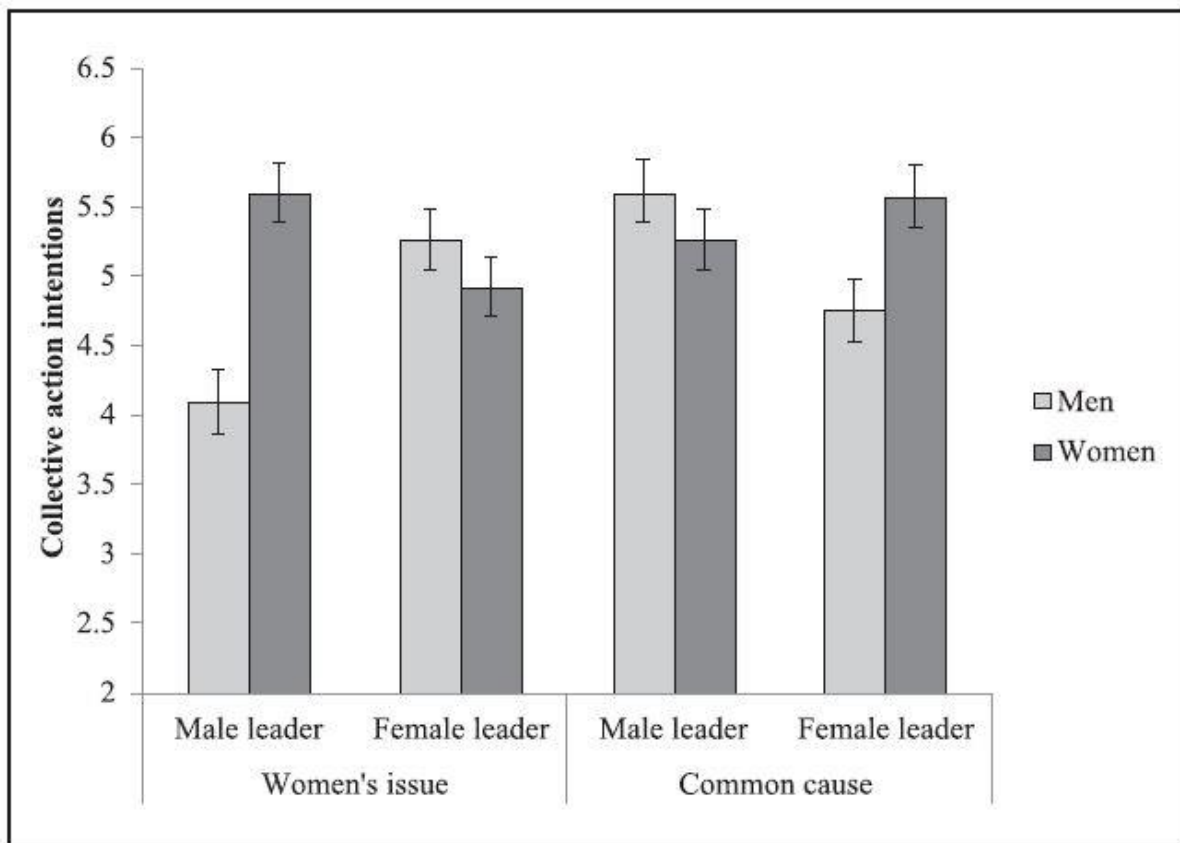


Figure 3. Mean collective action intentions as a function of participant gender, leader gender, and message framing. Error bars represent standard errors.

Klavina and van Zomeren (2018) have likewise conceptualised social identity processes as central to understanding the role of collective action involving third parties. Their research does not focus exclusively on the minority-majority-authority triad targeted by Subasic et al. (2008). Instead, more broadly, it explores when and why identity-related processes may facilitate (or impede) *any* form of third-party collective action on behalf of another group. To do so, they have extended the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (or SIMCA) developed by van Zomeren and colleagues (e.g. see van zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008; Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004), which is itself built on seminal work in the social identity tradition (see especially Reicher, 1982, 1984). The SIMCA model holds that strong ingroup identification tends to impel collective action by encouraging group members to develop a shared sense of injustice, efficacy and anger at their mistreatment – all of which motivates them to struggle, together, for social change.

According to Klavina and Van Zomeren (2018), the extension of the SIMCA to encompass third party collective action involves two distinctive pathways, entailing: (1) identity-related protection of the outgroup and (2) identity-related protection of the ingroup. The two pathways invoke social psychological processes that are essentially similar. *Identity-related protection of the outgroup* expresses individuals' identification with outgroup members who are locked into wider patterns of conflict or inequality with another group. This identification intensifies perceptions that an allied outgroup is being treated unjustly by and, in turn, encourages third party collective action on the allied group's behalf. Such action is motivated directly by a sense of injustice and indirectly via a heightening of members' sense of collective anger and efficacy. *Identity-related protection of the ingroup* follows a parallel pathway. When group members perceive that an allied minority group is being subjected to discrimination by another group, then this intensifies their sense of identification with their own group. This may again encourage them to engage in third party collective action on behalf of the allied, and similarly threatened, group – in this case, as a means of ingroup protection.



Via these dual pathways, then, members of third-party groups may be motivated to engage in third party collective action. Evidencing their model, Klavina and van Zomeren (2018) present survey data gathered across a range of cultural contexts. For example, data supporting both of their proposed pathways are provided by a study conducted in Latvia. This showed how identity-related protection of both the ingroup and the outgroup predicted Latvians' willingness to engage in third party collective resistance to Russia's annexation of the Ukraine. Similarly, survey data gathered in the US demonstrated that both pathways predicted Latino Americans' collective solidarity with African Americans in the context of challenging police violence.

Interestingly, in both surveys, third party collective action intentions were predicted not only by strength of collective identification and anger, but also by respondents' sense of shared efficacy and past experiences of positive contact with an allied group. That is, Latvians and Latino Americans who believed that mobilization involving members of both their ingroup and the affiliated outgroup - in this case Ukrainians and African Americans respectively – was more likely to be successful also expressed greater willingness to participate in collective action on their behalf. Arguably, this may reflect what Cakal et al. (2018) have recently labelled the 'power in numbers' effect. Likewise, Latvians and Latino Americans who had previously experienced more frequent positive contact with affiliated groups were also more willing to act collectively on their behalf. This is arguably because such contact enables the development of a sense of shared grievance, political solidarity, and even common identity.

Supporting this idea, Dixon et al. (2015) explored relations between Indian and Black residents of Northdale, a community located in the South African city of Pietermaritzburg in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Specifically, using a door-to-door field survey (n=365), they investigated the role of interracial contact in shaping Indian residents' willingness to act in solidarity with their black neighbours with regard to the local council's failure to provide electrification and potable water facilities for some of the poorest, largely black occupied, settlements of Northdale. Their results

suggested that positive contact with black Africans predicted Indian respondents' support both for policies of social change and for collective action to pressurize the local municipality to implement such policies. As Figure 4 illustrates, this relationship was partly mediated by Indians' increased awareness of outgroup discrimination and a heightened sense of empathy with their black neighbours. Poignantly, such findings indicate communities who were historically divided as part of the broader 'divide and rule' logic of apartheid - and encouraged to view one another as being locked in relations of competition and immutable difference - have the capacity to act in unison under changing conditions, potentially challenging the legitimacy of third party authorities.

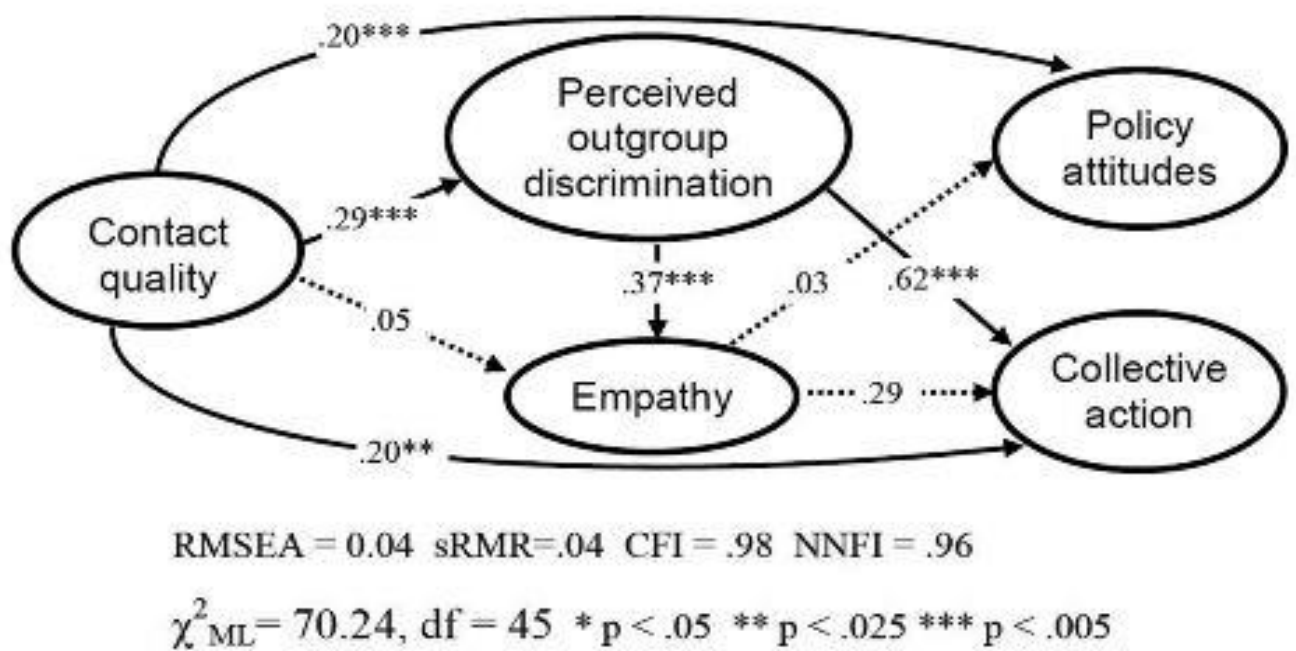


Figure 4. SEM model of the direct and indirect effects of interracial contact on Indian South Africans' political solidarity with black South Africans in Northdale, Pietermaritzburg

Note: In this figure, the variables refer specifically to outgroup empathy, perceived discrimination against the outgroup, and support for policies and collective action designed to benefit outgroup members.

In sum, although still relatively sparse and derived mainly from cross-sectional surveys, emerging evidence has clarified when and why third party and other forms of complex collective action may occur. In its focus on common identification, sense of shared injustice, joint efficacy and the role of contact between groups who share a history of disadvantage, this work elucidates social and psychological dynamics that are effectively antithetical to the ‘divide and rule’ processes explored earlier in our paper. As Figure 1, panel b above anticipates, it offers a potential blueprint for promoting collective action grounded in a model of social change that moves beyond simple ingroup-outgroup binaries and underpins a multigroup ‘unite and resist’ principle.

Many caveats are of course necessary at this point. In practice, for example, existing status hierarchies and structures of segregation may pre-empt the formation of political alliances between disadvantaged communities and limit the kinds of contact that might encourage their development. Moreover, as we have seen, the tenuously ‘in between’ status of intermediary groups may generate both instrumental and identity-related motivations for rejecting joint collective action to challenge the status quo (Caricati, 2018). We would add that such motivations may often be strategically nurtured by political elites in the face of the potential threats posed by coalitions of the disadvantaged. For instance, they may adopt social policies that shore up existing status hierarchies or defuse political activism (Dixon et al., 2015).

Notwithstanding the importance of such qualifications, the broader point of this section has been to show how the nature, course and outcomes of collective action are often not merely *intergroup* but also *multigroup* in character. As the work of Drury, Stott and colleagues (e.g., Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2003), Subašić et al. (2008) and Klavina & Van Zomeren (2018) demonstrates, this again highlights the necessity of developing models of social change that transcend the simple two group perspective dominates social psychology.

### **Concluding thoughts: Integrative themes and future directions**

We began this paper by citing Sherif's (1962) classic definition of intergroup relations. We also noted how his 'Summer Camp' studies have come to epitomise the problem of understanding why groups become locked in violent, binary conflict. As Billig (1976) pointed out more than 40 years ago, however, this characterization of Sherif's work – dramatized in the battle between the 'Rattlers' and the 'Eagles' – is itself a simplification . . . and we would argue a rather instructive one (see also Cherry, 1995; Perry, 2018). It effaces the role of a critically important third group in the Summer Camp studies: the team of psychologists who created the conditions under which the boys formed distinctive group identities, became embedded within relations of negative interdependence, engaged in conflictual behaviour, and ultimately had that behaviour moderated via the imposition of superordinate goals. In short, even in this classic study of binary intergroup relations, we cannot understand the nature, origins and trajectory of the conflict without appreciating the more complex web of relations between the main protagonists and a third-party authority. It is perhaps revealing, however, that textbook treatments of Sherif and colleagues' work have typically ignored role of such tripolar relations<sup>4</sup>.

In the present paper, we have argued that this tendency reflects a wider bias in our field. Most of what we know about the social psychology of intergroup relations has emerged from studies of how one group of people (e.g. whites) think and feel about another (e.g. blacks). By reducing the social world to binary categories, such studies have implemented an effective and highly efficient methodological framework. Yet, as we have sought to emphasize, they have also obscured some important features of social relations in historically divided and unequal societies. Our focus on triadic relations has itself, of course, grossly simplified intergroup relations in most societies. We have adopted this focus for heuristic reasons. Our main point has been to problematize – and potentially transcend – the standard social psychological treatment of intergroup relations in terms of even more simplistic binaries.

Proposing a complementary perspective, we have highlighted the importance of investigating intergroup relationships involving more than two groups and of exploring not only their psychological, but also their political and historical significance. We have argued that this shift in focus may illuminate patterns of domination and subordination, collusion and betrayal, solidarity and resistance that have been generally neglected in our field. Developing this argument, we have discussed the conditions under which members of historically disadvantaged groups either dissolve into internecine competition or unite to challenge the status quo, drawing on emerging work on: (1) policy attitudes in complexly stratified societies, (2) the role of 'intermediary' status groups in promoting or undermining social change; (3) the consequences of vertical and horizontal forms of intergroup contact involving more than two groups, and (4) third party involvement in collective action. It is perhaps worth re-emphasizing here that existing psychological research on complex forms of intergroup dynamics is limited in extent and based on evidence collected in a relatively narrow range of social contexts and using a limited range of methods. Moreover, in many societies, distinguishing between lower, intermediate and higher status groups is not as simple as it may first appear – some societies, for example, have sharply defined status boundaries, others more blurred, shifting and subtle boundaries. Bearing these limitations in mind, we will now conclude by outlining some integrative themes and highlighting potential directions for future research.

### **Methodological implications**

A recurring theme of our paper concerns the need to develop methodological frameworks for studying intergroup dynamics beyond a simple two group scenario. Indeed, as we have noted, in many areas of research little or no evidence exists about what we've called the 'complex relationality' of intergroup processes. Moreover, the work that does exist has sometimes qualified what we think we know (e.g. see Harstone & Augoustinos, 1995; Spielman, 2000). As Hanna

Zagefka (2018, p.3) has recently emphasized: "The huge body of work on dyadic intergroup processes has undoubtedly generated a plethora of important findings and insights. Still our knowledge of intergroup processes will remain incomplete unless we do justice to relations which involve more than two entities." Developing this idea, Zagefka offers several concrete recommendations about how to investigate triadic relations that involve different combinations of observers, agents and recipients of intergroup behaviour, whilst also highlighting some potential sources of confound to avoid when designing research on such relations<sup>5</sup>.

We want to make two additional, and somewhat broader, methodological points here. First, in our view, the self-evident nature of intergroup binaries must be treated as a problem to be explained rather than an organic starting point for psychological research. We can no longer employ such binaries unreflectingly within our research designs, e.g. as the pre-given categories of questionnaire surveys or experiments. To do so may be to unintentionally sustain the kind of historical and political amnesia that allowed, for example, colonial authorities to create the very divisions that they later attributed to the atavistic hatreds of warring factions. The point is important enough to be stressed: as soon as our methods enable us to see more complex intergroup configurations, it becomes apparent that fixed binaries are the exception rather than the rule. Treating rare instances as if they were the general case, results not only in accounts that are descriptively inaccurate - it also precludes us from explaining the very social psychological processes through which, under specific conditions, social reality crystalizes around binary oppositions. Along these lines, for example, Elcherath and Reicher (2017) have recently reviewed research showing how collective identities and relations may change abruptly during violent confrontations. In the former Yugoslavia, reanalyses of historic survey data and related archival material have revealed that a rich configuration of social cleavages existed on the eve of war, of which ethnic differences were neither the most relevant nor salient. As ethnographic accounts and subsequent surveys show, it was only following the outburst of violence that the previous

complexity was reduced and that binary divisions - notably between Croats and Serbs in Croatia, and Muslims and Serbs in large parts of Bosnia - gradually overrode more complex social cleavages.

Second and related, we want to advocate a methodological approach that can capture the dynamic practices of category construction through which such binaries, over time, become reified as normal or even 'natural' ways to frame intergroup relations (cf. Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Some of these practices are discursive in nature: invoking binary oppositions, constructing them as normative, and silencing other constructions of social relations (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Others are about creating material conditions under which social relations become experienced in binary terms, e.g. through systems of segregation or the distribution of social benefits and risks along binary cleavages (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017). Correspondingly, we need to recover alternative ways of understanding and (re)contextualising such binaries, exploring where they come from, what sustains them, and what social relations they are obscuring. As it turns out, the accounts of ordinary participants in intergroup struggles often provide rich material in this respect. Kerr et al.'s (2017) work on so-called 'black on black' xenophobia in South Africa provides one example of how studying such accounts might enrich our field. As this work illustrates powerfully, what may initially look like a case of binary violence may result from more complex patterns of intergroup power relations.

### **Identity complexity, intergroup relations and political attitudes**

The importance of complex social identity dynamics in shaping social inequality and discrimination is another integrative theme of this review, extending related social psychological work on intergroup relations (e.g. see Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). As we have seen, for example, attitudes towards policies designed to address racial inequality in multiracial societies reflect not only citizens' material interests, but also how they draw the very boundaries of their

collective identities (Dixon et al., 2017a). Likewise, the social change orientations and intergroup attitudes of intermediary group members tend to reflect identity-related concerns that arise from their fragile ‘in between’ position within status hierarchies (Caricati, 2018). The likelihood that individuals belonging to ‘third party’ groups will engage in collective action to support affiliated outgroups is likewise shaped by their common identification with members of such groups (Subašić et al., 2008), as well as an associated motivation to protect ingroup and outgroup identity (Klavina & van Zomeren, 2018).

Such work speaks to the complexity of identity formation and expression in contexts involving more than two groups. It shows how social identities may be constructed via both upwards and downwards processes of social comparison. This process may implicate varying expressions of differentiation from higher status groups ‘above’ and lower status groups ‘below’, the nature and consequences of which, as work on Social Identity Theory has demonstrated (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), are linked to factors such as the perceived ideological stability and legitimacy of the social order. Crucially, such identity-related processes have potentially profound implications for understanding when and why intermediary status groups either defend the status quo or express political solidarity with lower status groups and seek to challenge social inequality. As we have seen, Caricati and colleagues’ (2018) studies are an important touchstone in this respect. We would also flag here emerging work on the transformative role played by so-called ‘gateway’ groups – that is, groups whose members embody identity complexity and fusion (e.g. biracial or bi-ethnic group members) - in shaping the affective trajectory of intergroup relations in contexts where multiple groups and social identities coexist (see Levy et al., 2017).

Our more general point is that research on intermediate or ‘in between’ groups remains comparatively neglected. Existing research evidence, though suggestive and important (as reviewed by Caricati, 2018), is based on small-scale opportunity samples and focused on a relatively narrow range of social contexts and forms of intergroup relations. Specifically, the



conditions under which intermediary groups participate in collective action to promote social change merits further inquiry. The nature of intergroup contact within complexly stratified societies represents one such condition.

### **Contact, collective action and social change revisited**

The majority of work on intergroup contact has focused on its potential to reduce the prejudices of members of historically groups towards members of historically disadvantaged groups and, albeit less commonly, vice versa (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). However, the effects of contact implicate relationships that are more complex than simple dichotomies such as 'advantaged' versus 'disadvantaged' or 'minority' versus majority' and extend beyond the immediacy of participating groups.

Two potential areas of future research are worth underlining here. The first complicates the now well-established finding that positive contact has a stronger effect on the prejudices of majority group members than it does on the prejudices of minority group members, as evidenced by Tropp & Pettigrew's (2005) influential meta-analysis. What has not yet been explored, to our knowledge, is how more complex forms of social stratification shape the contact-prejudice relationship. To give an example: how, if at all, is this relationship affected by belonging to an intermediate status group, whose members may experience contact that involves interaction with outgroups who are *both* higher and lower in status? Conversely, how might contact dynamics operating within a relatively 'flat' hierarchy of subordination - in which several groups of roughly equivalent levels of low status interact both with one another and a clearly dominant group - shape related patterns of intergroup attitudes?

The second and related area of future research concerns the apparently paradoxical effects of intergroup contact on collective action involving third parties. On the one hand, vertical contact between dominant and subordinate group members may, ironically, sometimes reduce the latter's

readiness to form political alliances with members of other subordinate groups (Dixon et al., 2017b). In this sense, to borrow Cakal et al.'s (2011) metaphor, it may exercise a 'sedative' effect on social change. We need to know more about the nature and boundary conditions of this effect.

On the other hand, horizontal contact between disadvantaged communities may work in precisely the opposite direction, encouraging them to form a sense of shared injustice and collective efficacy and thus to unite to mount a challenge to political authorities (Dixon et al., 2015). Klavina and van Zomeren's recent (2018) extension of the SIMCA has hinted at the potential value of this kind of integration of work on contact and third-party collective action. It suggests that positive interactions between communities who share a common history of discrimination and who thus can, via such interactions, forge a shared belief in their capacity to achieve social change may increase the likelihood of joint resistance to a third-party dominant group.

Again, however, we would emphasize that this area of research is very much in its infancy. In particular, research on the effects of contact between historically disadvantaged groups on their political attitudes and behaviours remains rare (see also Dixon et al., 2015, 2017b), and the theoretical mechanisms that might link positive - and indeed negative (cf. Reimer et al., 2017) - contact experiences to joint collective action in relation to third party authorities remain under-specified. In our view, such experiences are likely to involve social psychological processes that are quite distinct from those specified within classic prejudice reduction models, which tend to emphasize processes of stereotype reduction and promotion of positive outgroup emotions. They require us to work towards an integration of theories of intergroup contact with theories of subordinate group solidarity and third-party collective action. In other words, we need to know more about what kinds of contact experiences might lead members of groups who share a history of disadvantage, vis à vis a dominant group, to unite to challenge the status quo.

In this regard, research on the contact experiences of protesters *within* unfolding events of collective action may prove particularly revealing and constitute another important topic for

future research. As illustrated by the work of Drury, Stott and colleagues, protest marches, riots and other forms of crowd behaviour often initially comprise multiple groups, divided by different identities, rallying against one or more authorities with aim of resisting or promoting social change (e.g. Stott et al., 2018). More broadly, it is plausible that dynamics similar to those described in crowd research play a key role in a wider range of intergroup histories. The varying forms of intergroup interaction through which this kind of ideological process is either enacted or thwarted, and the social psychological processes that it implicates, once more requires us to grapple with the group processes beyond a simple 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy.

### Footnotes

1. Formally instituted by the nationalist government in 1955, this policy originated in a longer historical process through which the white ruling class sought "...to deflect the challenge of a mass opposition against the state." (Goldin, 1984, p.112). In effect, it fostered and protected employment opportunities for 'Coloured' workers, primarily in the Western Cape region, whilst denying such opportunities to 'black Africans', who were subject to policies of influx control and deportation.
2. The highly complex cultural context of India, of course, also illustrates the inherent limits of shifting from dyadic to triadic intergroup relations. The challenge is ultimately not simply to move beyond binaries, but also to understand how far more complex and intersecting social category memberships shape individuals' thoughts, feelings and behaviours within specific contexts.
3. It is difficult to imagine, for example, many social psychologists nowadays endorsing Le Bon's (1895) famous observation - based partly on his assessment of collective action during the French revolution - that during events of mass revolution participants undergo a 'loss' of personality, resulting in behaviours "...almost always observed in beings belonging

to inferior forms in evolution - in women, savages and children for instance" (p. 24). To the contrary, collective action is now increasingly viewed as motivated by social identity dynamics, thus being limited by category-relevant norms and values as well as the historical patterning of intergroup relationships.

4. Sherif and colleagues were themselves acutely aware that the success of their field experiments required them to mask their own role as third party provocateurs. When this role became evident in the 1953 version of the summer camp (Sherif et al., 1955), and the two groups of boys turned their attention towards the manipulative actions of the experimenters, aggressive intergroup competition between them did not emerge (Platow & Hunter, 2014; Perry, 2018). From the perspective of its experimental goals, the study was deemed a failure and, probably as a consequence, fell into relative obscurity. However, from the present perspective, it is remarkable that even the most iconic of all two-group studies already contained the seeds of its own re-contextualisation as a more complex (i.e., triadic) intergroup system.
5. Zagefka's (2017) work explores specifically how onlookers understand and evaluate the actions they witness between an actor and the recipient of such actions. This triadic relationship, she argues, is complexly shaped by the group memberships of all three.

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